ON THE HABITS OF BEETLES OF THE GENUS *CATOPS*

By Allen H. Benton[1] and John Wilcox[2]

The beetles of the genus *Catops* are widely known as fungus feeders, and because they are sometimes found on dead mammals they have been considered to be carrion feeders. There is, however, some evidence that members of this genus, like small beetles in the related families Leptinidae and Platypsillidae, may be casual or accidental ectoparasites of small mammals.

There is strong evidence that these beetles feed on hair and other wastes from small mammals. Blatchley (Coleoptera of Indiana, 1910) recorded *Catops terminans* (Lec.) from the nests of mice, and *C. basilaris* Say from the nest of a short-tailed shrew. Leonard (List of Insects of New York, 1928) reported, on the authority of Leng and Davis, that *C. terminans* had been taken from owl pellets on three occasions. Since owl pellets consist entirely of bones, hair and bits of undigested tissue, it seems evident that the beetles were feeding on such materials. From eating such waste in nests and owl pellets, it is a short step to feeding directly on the mammal itself. Jameson (Journal of Mammalogy, vol. 31(2):141, May, 1950) recorded *C. basilaris* from short-tailed shrews (*Blarina brevicauda*) but assumed it to be a carrion feeder.

In extensive trapping operations in 1952 and 1953, four beetles of this genus were removed from mice or mouse nests. The total of these specimens is greater than the total number of *Leptinus americanus*, a true parasite of shrews, of which three specimens were taken during this period. Specimens of *Catops* taken were: *Catops terminans*—Bushnellsville, Greene county, N. Y., June 4, 1952, from *Clethrionomys gapperi*, the red-backed mouse; *C. basilaris*—Town of Berlin, Rensselaer county, N. Y., July 29 and August 11, 1953, from the red-backed mouse; *C. alsiosus* Horn—Albany, Albany county, N. Y., March 16, 1953, from nest on *Microtus pennsylvanicus*, the meadow vole.

The external similarity between *Catops* and *Leptinus* is striking. This similarity may not be significant with regard to similarity of habits, but it seems worthy of note.

The above evidence indicates that some members of this genus, found of freshly killed mammals and in mammal nests, may actually occur at times on living animals. Whether these occurrences are accidental, or whether this is a case of incipient or actual ectoparasitism, has not been established. The habits of these beetles might well be subjected to further study.

---

[1] New York State College for Teachers, Albany, New York.
[2] New York State Museum, Albany, New York.